

VZCZCXRO7071  
PP RUEHGA RUEHHA RUEHMT RUEHQU RUEHVC  
DE RUEHOT #1293/01 2761411  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 021411Z OCT 08  
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8568  
INFO RUCNCAN/ALL CANADIAN POSTS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 OTTAWA 001293

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/01/2013

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTION 2008: VISITS TO THE "WAR ROOMS"

REF: A. TORONTO 288  
[1](#)B. OTTAWA 1258  
[1](#)C. OTTAWA 1216  
[1](#)D. OTTAWA 632

Classified By: PolMinCouns Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The contrast between the state-of-the-art Conservative Party campaign "war room" and its rather ramshackle Liberal Party equivalent helps to explain why Conservatives are at least 11 percentage points in the polls about whom electors would vote for if the federal election were held today. Incumbency helps, too, with the Liberals having had to scramble more to set up a campaign once the Conservatives decided on September 7 to call for the new election on October 14. Senior officials from each campaign continue to predict victory, but the Conservatives continue to have the advantage. Liberals have profited slightly from bumps to the Conservatives such as the U.S. financial meltdown and apparent plagiarism by Stephen Harper's staff in 2003, but not enough to make much difference. While the October 1 and 2 leaders' debates (septel) are potential opportunities for candidates to stumble, few expect many voters to change their minds as a result. End Summary.

Liberals pinch pennies...

[1](#)2. (C) National campaign officials from the opposition Liberal Party and the ruling Conservative Party on September 30 and October 1 welcomed PolMinCouns to their respective campaign headquarters -- the "war rooms." (Ref d reported on a pre-election visit to the Conservatives' "fear factory;" the Liberals at that time had not yet set up a campaign space). The Liberals are holed up in a half dozen rooms in existing party office space in a downtown high-rise, with 2-4 workers operating out of cubicles that normally would house one person. Electric fans somewhat mitigate the heat generated by the extra computers and other electrical equipment in use, but the temperatures remain in the lower 80s. About 40 people -- about half volunteers and half paid staff -- run the campaign at the national level, with some additional federal Liberal party officials also working in each province and territory, according to national director Greg Fergus (who will shortly participate in a U.S. International Visitor Program on the U.S. elections).

[1](#)3. (C) About four people -- under logistics chief Doug Ferguson, whose Liberal campaign experiences go back to the early 1980s -- handle all the travel not only for Liberal Party leader Stephane Dion but also for deputy leader Michael Ignatieff and Foreign Affairs Critic Bob Rae when they are not backing up the leader. Ferguson admitted the near-fiasco involved in renting an aircraft from Air InnuIt that turned out to be an embarrassing gas guzzler for this "Green Shift" campaign. He explained that Air Canada no longer kept many surplus aircraft in its fleet and the Conservatives were able to snap up the one available extra plane first, given that they, unusually, brought down their own government and set the date for the election. Rental from U.S. airlines was politically impossible, he claimed. On at least one occasion



already, the campaign has been stranded due to the plane's maintenance problems.

14. (C) A small white board covered with notations in magic marker demonstrated the traveling strategy for the duration of the campaign. Fergus confirmed the importance of making the campaign truly national, but admitted that almost all the campaign stops in western and central Canada -- where the Liberals have few or no seats -- were early on. The closest Dion will go to the three northern territories -- with only three seats, two of them Liberal -- will be to Churchill in northern Manitoba. Now in these final two weeks of the campaign, Dion will almost exclusively concentrate on Quebec and Ontario, planning on overnighing in Toronto for most of the last week but making day-time appearances in rural and suburban Ontario. Dion will vote in Montreal on October 14. On the road, the leader travels in an ordinary bus, accompanied by the gaggle of press and a small protective detail from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

15. (C) Fergus and Director for Election Readiness Heather Chiasson admitted that the Liberals have had far fewer resources at their disposal than the Conservatives, explaining that the small town pattern of individual contributors that the Conservatives had inherited from their predecessor parties had positioned them well for Liberal-instituted limitations on campaign contributions earlier this decade. They admitted that the Liberals had gotten too accustomed to large corporate contributions that were no longer permissible, and had not developed much of a network of small contributors, despite recent attempts.

OTTAWA 00001293 002 OF 003

16. (C) One key unit in the campaign office has a sign on its interior window described it as the "Ministry of Truth aka The Dirt Factory." One of its biggest scoops so far was the discovery that in 2003 Stephen Harper, then in opposition, gave a speech in support of the war in Iraq that cribbed heavily from a speech that Australian then-Prime Minister John Howard had given two days earlier. Rae used contrasting broadcasts of these speeches in a highly publicized speech in Toronto on September 30, insisting "Can't Believe Steve" and emphasizing the phrase "Stephen Harper -- not up to the job." Dion publicly called Harper a plagiarist. (Subsequently, a Conservative speechwriter took full responsibility for the cribbing and resigned.)

17. (C) Despite organizational hiccups, financial limitations, added competition for votes from the Green Party, and inherent challenges of being the opposition party in a multi-party race, Fergus predicted a "victory" for the Liberals on October 14, but, when pressed, admitted that, at best, the Liberals would win by only a "small minority." He expressed special concern that Liberal support in the second generation New Canadian immigrant families was waning, which could hurt the party even in traditional strongholds like Toronto and Montreal.

...while the Conservatives ooze confidence  
-----

18. (C) The state-of-the-art Conservative war room in a large building in suburban Ottawa, in contrast, was a model of discipline, planning, and comfort in action. About 130 staffers and volunteers (with another 20 on the road doing advance work) occupy well-spaced work stations, grouped into units like "target ridings" (for key votes), "candidate support," "research," and "Quebec." The sophisticated media center has been in daily use, although reporters quickly rebelled against the original plan for 6 a.m. briefings, according to staffers. An upscale caterer provides all meals, and there is shuttle service to and from downtown every half hour.



¶9. (C) Conservative National Campaign Director Doug Finley (husband of MP and Minister for Civilization and Immigration Diane Finley) commented that the campaign had gone about as smoothly as imaginable, but noted that "we've been planning this for more than two years." Even so, he now predicts that the Conservatives will win at most 145 seats, up from the 127 seats in the 39th Parliament, but still short of the 155 members needed to form a majority in the 308 seat House of Commons. He claimed that it had become "almost impossible" for any party to win a majority given that "core constituencies" would give each of the four main parties between 30-40 seats, leaving them (and the Greens) to compete for the remaining 168 or so seats. The key focus for the remainder of the Conservative campaign will be on Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia as well as, to a lesser degree, Newfoundland, where Premier Danny Williams has been waging an "Anything but Conservative" counter-campaign. Finley estimated that support among female voters -- a key new target audience for the Conservatives -- had risen about 5 pct, but said that no one has been able accurately to gauge levels of support, if any, among second generation immigrants, because pollsters had found it virtually impossible to single them out. He lamented the unusual "volatility" among Quebec voters; while the Conservatives had gotten off to a great start there, the Bloc Quebecois had bounced back up in recent days, with the New Democratic Party (NDP) faring surprisingly well in many ridings as well. Q(NDP) faring surprisingly well in many ridings as well.

¶10. (C) Finley observed that, while the media would hype the October 1 and 2 leaders' debates, probably only a "couple of hundred thousands" of viewers would tune in, so, as in the U.S. presidential debates, the post-debate spin by the various parties would likely shape attitudes more than the leaders' actual performances. He admitted that the new economic concerns in the wake of the U.S. financial problems had helped the Liberals, due to collective memories of a strong Canadian economy in the 1990s under Liberal Prime Ministers Paul Martin and Jean Chretien, but he predicted that an eventual rescue package by the U.S. Congress would rebound to the benefit of the Conservatives by placating the "fear factor." He pooh-poohed any impact from the 2003 plagiarism charges, claiming that the story was "over within hours" once the Conservatives figured out who was actually responsible and put him forward to explain his error.

¶11. (C) The Conservatives will launch a new batch of campaign ads (made in-house) on October 2, according to Finley, following up on their earlier successful series of brief interviews featuring the "warmer and fuzzier Stephen Harper." He admitted that, to sway undecided voters, Harper still needed better to "show compassion" both in the debates and through these new ads, in order to counteract lingering

OTTAWA 00001293 003 OF 003

impressions of him as impersonal and/or abrasive.

Conservatives still lead the pack  
-----

¶12. (U) Most polls continue to put the Conservatives 10 - 12 points ahead of the Liberals, usually with about 36 - 37 pct of respondents saying they would vote for that party if the election took place today. The CPAC/Nanos poll -- which predicted the 2006 election results almost exactly -- on October 1 indicated that 35 pct of respondents also picked Harper as the best Prime Minister among the candidates, with Dion in third place (at 15 pct), behind even NDP leader Jack Layton (at 18 pct). Harper has a similarly strong lead on questions of trustworthiness, competence, and vision, with Dion only on October 1 finally pulling ahead slightly of Layton for second place.

Visit Canada,s Economy and Environment Forum at  
<http://www.intelink.gov/communities/state/canada>



WILKINS